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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 003348

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: JORDANIAN PARLIAMENT ASKS KING TO CALL SPECIAL  
SESSION; ISLAMIST AGENDA LEFT OUT IN THE COLD

REF: A. AMMAN 1452

[1](#)B. AMMAN 0540

[1](#)C. AMMAN 0304

Classified By: Ambassador Edward W. Ghenm for Reasons 1.5 (b), (d)

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SUMMARY

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[1](#)1. (U) The Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament delivered a petition April 27 to the Prime Minister requesting an extraordinary session to debate 88 of the remaining provisional laws approved by the GOJ during Parliament's almost two-year absence. The petition was signed by 71 of the 110 members of the Lower House. The Islamic Action Front (IAF) had sought to expand the requested agenda of the special session to include the government's economic and educational policies, as well as "unscheduled topics," but the Lower House leadership resisted these efforts to prevent Islamist grandstanding and protect the palace. In accordance with the Constitution, King Abdullah is likely to issue a decree formally convening the session in June, but is not required to accept the petition's suggested topics for debate. End Summary.

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NO SUMMER BREAK FOR PARLIAMENT

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[1](#)2. (U) To no one's surprise, the Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament, Abdul Hadi Majali, presented to Prime Minister Faisal al-Fayez on April 27 a petition signed by 71 of the 110 members of the Chamber of Deputies requesting an extraordinary session of Parliament to debate 88 of the remaining provisional laws promulgated by the GOJ while Parliament was dissolved from October 2001 to July 2003. Parliament approved approximately 40 of the 211 provisional laws at the conclusion of its ordinary session last month. According to the Jordanian Constitution, the King may summon the Lower House to meet in an extraordinary session "at the request of an absolute majority of the deputies" via a petition specifying the matters the House wishes to discuss.

[1](#)3. (U) An almost identical petition requesting a special session signed by 66 deputies, including IAF MP Adnan Hassouneh (East Banker, Amman-4th District), had been given by MPs to Majali almost a week earlier. He had refrained from presenting it to Fayez, however, after the IAF leadership complained that it had not been consulted. IAF MP Azzam Huneidi (West Banker, Amman-1st District) told the media that the IAF was not necessarily against any of the 88 laws designated for debate by other MPs. But he claimed that the agenda needed to be broadened to include the government's education and economic policies in order to come up with a strategy to control the budget deficit and to further discuss the new school curricula. He also defended the need to include "unscheduled topics" so as to keep Parliament "on top of" local and regional events.

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SPEAKER RESISTS ISLAMIST DEMANDS

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[1](#)4. (C) Majali met with IAF members April 25 to try to reach common ground on the issues for discussion in the extraordinary session. Afterwards, Huneidi announced to the press that the meeting had been "positive" and that Majali "agreed to include our requests" in the petition. However, Secretary General of the Parliament Faiz Al-Shawabkeh, who

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also attended the meeting, told PolOff April 28 that while the discussions were cordial, Majali made no commitments or promises to expand the requested agenda beyond the 88 provisional laws. Shawabkeh further said that he had spoken to many of the IAF legislators one-on-one and that most of them were not particularly adamant about broadening the session's agenda. He opined that it was only when they all came together, perhaps not wanting to look weak in front of other IAF members, that they took on a more strident tone.

[1](#)5. (C) According to Shawabkeh, Majali decided to risk criticism from the IAF and present a petition to Fayez that did not broaden the debate agenda request beyond the

provisional laws. Both Shawabkeh and Majali agreed that the IAF's demands were solely intended to allow Islamist MPs to "grandstand," as they had done during the regular session debate on the budget, educational reform and the peace process (see refs a, b, c), and would contribute nothing to productive discussion.

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ROYAL PREROGATIVE  
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16. (U) Even if Majali had accommodated IAF demands in the petition for an extraordinary session, the decision on items for debate would still belong solely to King Abdullah. The Jordanian Constitution provides that the Lower House can only discuss during a special session "those (topics) specified in the Royal Decree convening the session." The King is free to accept, reject or amend topics of debate presented by Parliament in its petition.

17. (C) Ali Al-Hindawi, Director of Parliamentary Affairs at the Prime Ministry, told PolOff April 29 that the King would most likely convene an extraordinary session of Parliament beginning the first week of June with a duration of approximately two months. He further predicted that the King would limit debate to provisional laws only and that he might reduce the number of the laws discussed from the 88 proposed by Parliament. In Hindawi's opinion, Parliament would be able to debate and adopt a maximum of 30 laws during the extraordinary session.

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COMMENT  
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18. (C) While Majali may need IAF support to be re-elected as Speaker during the next session of Parliament, he undoubtedly considered the cost of putting off the Islamists as far less than submitting a petition that would put the King in the potentially awkward position of rejecting a request from Parliament. The lack of vocal criticism of Majali by the IAF for reneging on his alleged agreement shows that the Islamists were more interested in being publicly consulted than in forcing an agenda unacceptable to their colleagues and the palace.

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